



Textbook & Academic
Authors Association

Writing Accountability

Productivity Through Partnership



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Welcome

The Textbook & Academic Authors Association provides professional development resources, industry news, and networking opportunities for textbook authors and authors of scholarly journal articles and books.

This resource contains helpful information for textbook and academic authors on how to be more productive through writing accountability. Learn [how a personal writing team can increase your productivity](#), [how to be an effective writing accountability partner](#), [best practices for forming and participating in writing groups](#), and [how to develop healthy collaborative relationships](#).

Enjoy!

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How a Personal Writing Team Can Increase Your Productivity Through Accountability

Faculty writers at three different career stages shared how they came together to form a "personal writing team" that supports writing goals, productivity, and accountability.

At Teachers College, Felicia Moore Mensah is engaged in post-tenure/post-promotion. Mensah noted that her challenges and needs include time to write; additional roles, responsibilities, and service; re-imagining and re-visiting habits for writing; deeper application of theory, research methods, and teaching practice; and developing and mentoring young scholars.

Martinque "Marti" Jones was moving from graduate student to postdoctoral writing at Teachers College, Columbia University. At this stage of her career, Jones identified challenges of professional identity development, writing routine, project prioritization and timelines, and collaborations with students and colleagues. To face these challenges, she identified needs for understanding her personal and professional goals, professional resources, strong mentorship, and social support.

Dakota King-White was preparing for re-appointment and approaching tenure at Cleveland State University.

At this career stage, King faces challenges and needs for prioritizing research, teaching, and service; advocacy and boundaries pertaining to time commitments; an increase in teaching load; mentorship to navigate the process; and financial support for research.

How they are helping each other meet their needs

After meeting at TAA's 2017 Conference in Providence, RI, the team began a four-month pilot that has offered continuous support over the entire year. Utilizing technology to check-in and to document progress, the team has found personal success and have used the same format, structure, and technological tools to extend the impact to other team writing groups with students and colleagues.

Taking advantage of Google Team Drive technology, the team described two tools they used to address their identified challenges and needs: the ["Nearby Writers Group"](#) and related resource, ["The Wisdom Document"](#).

The Nearby Writers Group established the online accountability system for the team. The group set a common two-hour block of time to write, which was started and concluded by text message. A conference call to debrief occurred immediately following the writing session and the online document was used to share

accomplishments and next steps after the sessions. The document also provided a location for the other team members to offer encouragement based on the recorded accomplishments and progress.

As the senior member of the group, Mensah often answered questions from the junior members during the conference calls. To maintain a record of the questions and answers, Mensah's wisdom was recorded in The Wisdom Document.

This document became a central location for a wealth of knowledge including:

- Answers to questions about the writing and publishing process
- Shared experiences, insights, and how Mensah had moved along the career span
- Other topics, such as developing courses, teaching, advising, prioritizing, conferences, etc.
- Professional, personal, and social topics of discussion
- What mentorship looks like at different career stages

The overall impact of the team

Collectively in the four-month pilot program, the team logged over 203 hours of writing time resulting in the completion of a combined 22 writing projects. During the first year, they logged over 545 hours on 81 projects.

Jones noted personal benefits of having established a writing routine that facilitated prioritization and project timelines; the ability to offer professional and social support; and a broadened scope of resources.

King found the team to be a place of accountability, a safe place to process barriers to research, an opportunity to check-in with other colleagues, and a mentoring source throughout the academic year.

Mensah benefited from the team by finding time to write in small “chunks”, mentoring and supporting junior scholars, and keeping track of her writing projects in one place. As a result, she has developed Team Drives for seven other research teams and doctoral students.

Wisdom and tips from the team

As a result of this process, the team offered the following wisdom and tips for increasing your own productivity through accountability.

- Set an appointment to write consistently
- Let writing become habitual (develop good writing habits now)
- Invite others to join you in writing
- Keep track of your progress
- Reward yourself •

How to be an effective writing accountability partner

Has a colleague asked you to be their writing accountability partner? Accountability partners provide guidance, support, and motivation for a writer to forge ahead and stay on course with their writing. They also have a general interest in the writing success of the other person and can offer their own, different experiences, perspectives and ideas. All these things combined will help a writer overcome their challenges and barriers to writing success so they can be more productive, motivated, and able to reach their writing goals. To be an effective writing accountability partner, you need to be able to do these four things:

Give the right amount of cheer.

Being a positive cheerleader is important and can offer great encouragement for the person you are holding accountable. However, your job is not to be a constant cheerleader. You need to be able to say, "This wasn't your best week for productivity. I know you can do it. Just keep writing!"

Be able to play the roles of both challenger and supporter.

Your role is to offer support, yes, but you also need to be a challenger. You need to be able to push your colleague in the “write” direction and out of their comfort zone. There may be times when you need to help your colleague see further ahead and challenge them to strive for more (like submitting to a more prestigious journal).

Offer constructive, and honest, feedback.

Your job as an accountability partner is to make sure the person you are holding accountable is staying on task and meeting their goals. You have to be honest with them and let them know how they are doing along the way. They may also ask you to read through a rough draft of what they wrote. Read it thoroughly, make notes as you go, be positive, and give constructive, actionable feedback.

Be a neutral party.

Great accountability partners are not spouses, family, or close friends. You will make a better accountability partner if you are someone’s colleague or another independent person that can give neutral feedback that drives someone that may otherwise back off if it were someone closer to them. •

Writing groups: When, why, how, and best practices

By Dannelle D. Stevens, Professor Emerita at Portland State University

Academic writing can be a solitary, isolating experience for many authors. While that may work for some, solitary writing can leave many writers feeling unmotivated, lonely, and lost. I propose, and research has proven, taking a more collaborative, community-based approach to writing can be highly beneficial in terms of productivity, success, and enjoyment.

From feedback to accountability, to pop-up groups to writing retreats and workshops, when faculty meet and talk about their writing, they reduce isolation and improve their craft. Consequently, over time, faculty become more productive and less stressed because they are accomplishing their goals. In addition, they become part of a community of writers.

How do you start a writing group and what are writing group best practices? Gleaned from the research literature and my many years of belonging to and leading writing groups, here I identify five main themes and practices that groups should consider no matter what kind of group is formed. These best practices provide the foundation to building a successful writing group.

1) Be Organized and Consistent

While it is important to establish who will be the group “lead”, it is also crucial that the group members themselves decide how their group will run, as this helps build buy-in and commitment. All members should weigh in on decisions such as what is the schedule, what will the group do, how long and where to meet, how many members, etc.

2) Build Personal and Professional Relationships

Writing groups should not ignore fundamental communication and relationship-building among members. It is important to build trust, lay out ground rules, and establish positive communication using active listening strategies. I also recommend spending at least one session building trust and having a conversation around the ground rules. These conversations lead to rapport-building with a shared sense of mission for each member in meeting his or her individual writing goals.

3) Develop Shared Vision

Writing group members should try to generate a common vision and share their accomplishments. With decisions made about leadership and the establishment of positive relationships, the group can focus on being goal oriented for the group members and for the group itself. Pay

attention to time limits so that members feel that the time is not wasted or overextended. In addition, seek to be consistent about expectations for accountability.

4) Foster Positive Interactions

Each member of a writing group is personally responsible for fostering positive ongoing interactions that meet member goals and contribute to constructive interactions among the members. Initial excitement for the group may waver as time passes. The group may wander away from the ground rules established early on. By being supportive of and respectful to each other, the group works well. It is not a bad idea to check in on the initial ground rules about midway through the term. Some members may need encouragement in commenting on how the group is working for them.

5) Celebrate Accomplishment

Devising ways to reward progress encourages more progress. The reward might be doing lunch, dinner, or happy hour at a local restaurant. If members reframe events as rewards for meeting writing goals, these can be seen as more enjoyable. •

Developing healthy collaborative relationships: Why and how

Collaborative writing relationships can be advantageous to all involved when designed for success, but without self-awareness and clear communication, these relationships can set projects on a path of failure. In academia, opportunities exist for both student-to-student collaboration as well as collaboration between students and professors, say Laura Jacobi and Justin Rudnick, both assistant professors at Minnesota State University, Mankato; Alyssa Harter, an assistant professor at Umpqua Community College; and Cristy Dougherty, a PhD candidate at University of Denver.

Why collaborate with students?

In a culture of “publish or perish”, professors can gain traction on their own writing and research agenda through collaboration with students. A “divide & conquer” approach to writing with others can help meet deadlines for submission and allow for the completion of more projects than can be done as an individual, but collaboration is not without its own challenges and requirements for success.

In the case of working with students as collaborators, the group caution faculty members to “be aware of the power dynamics”.

Whereas a professor is often in the role of a supervisor, a collaborative relationship should be one of mentorship and guidance instead of directive instruction. As such, the group advises being “flexible in your approach” and “open to different thoughts, voices, and unexpected conclusions”.

They share the following strategies for successful professor-student collaborations.

Reflect First

For greatest success, plan ahead. By addressing potential concerns, individual needs, and overall expectations ahead of time, you can prevent many common problems during the collaborative writing process. They suggest that you “have a ‘pre-writing’ conversation in which you determine if writing collaboratively is a good idea and, if so, how you would collaborate before starting.”

The goal of the conversation should be to “craft expectations of the collaborative relationship that allow all parties to gain from the experience”. During this conversation you should identify the goals faculty have for the student(s), goals faculty have for themselves, and goals students have for themselves.

Set Boundaries

After setting goals, the group advises that you “set boundaries that fit the collaborators” and “stick to them.”

These boundaries may define both formal and informal roles, a timeline for the project, physical spaces for collaborative time, personal spaces for non-collaborative time, and the best channel and frequency of communication. In the end, you should feel confident that everyone is on the same page regarding goals, expectations, and authorship.

Communicate Effectively

From start to finish, the success of a collaborative relationship relies on effective communication. According to the presenters, “communication is paramount for building a collaborative relationship”. As a guide, they offer the following tips for effective communication in collaborative settings:

- Be open about what you are/aren't comfortable with
- Don't feel bad for not communicating when you need a break or decide to take the day off
- Find your personal rhythm and purpose within the study

- Seek additional help/advice outside of your collaborative partner(s)
- Don't be afraid to ask for help or direction from your collaborative partner(s)
- Collaborative relationships offer great opportunity for all collaborators to meet their personal goals while helping their partner(s) do the same. Healthy collaborative relationships offer an environment of accountability and performance but are reliant on self-awareness and clear communication.

When considering a potential collaboration, take the time to identify goals, roles, and expectations in advance. Then, communicate clearly throughout the process to maintain adherence to those guidelines. •

Join the TAA Authoring Community

With membership in TAA, you are not alone. As a TAA member, you become part of a diverse community of textbook and academic authors with similar interests and goals.

Discover just some of the member resources available to help you navigate your path to writing success:

- Increase your writing productivity by participating in live webinars or watching more than 250 on demand presentations.
- Browse a growing library of downloadable templates, worksheets, checklists and samples.
- Offset your out-of-pocket expenses with a publication grant or textbook contract review grant.
- Browse a list of industry professionals offering discounted rates and other special offers.
- Gain access to more than a dozen other eBook downloads.
- Receive discounted rates on the TAA Conference.

Learn more at TAAonline.net/join